

Undead 1191

Chapter 1191: The One Left Standing (5)

Karima's Dormant Territory.

"They've changed locations?!" Dellan exclaimed when he saw the image from the mirror, which he and the others were looking at the battle through, suddenly turn dark. It had just been depicting the full view of the great tower of darkness, but just when the four-armed creature had leaped out of the building...

"I've made it so that the mirror tracks the movements of both of them across Aigas," the Herald Erlton said with a deep frown. "Even if we can't see what is happening inside that building, their signatures will register wherever else they appear."

No one added, questioned or subtracted from his explanation.

Erlton, Soidon, Dellan and Karima had mostly been quiet while anticipating what would happen when the two fighters exited the building. It had, of course, been a little surprising to Erlton when his mirror failed to interpret what was happening within the tower, but he chalked it up to perhaps a series of Creeds that had been made by Skullius to prevent surveillance.

Whatever it was that was happening inside must have been really intense though. But then...

"Oh! It's showing something again!" Soidon said as the mirror refreshed. He then tilted his head in confusion. "Why is it showing two perspectives?"

Just as he asked this, however, Karima snapped his head to the right, where he felt something funny going on around the borders of his Territory.

A girl with lime-green hair had poked her head in, and then proceeded to push her whole body into the dark interior of the Territory, which was littered with luminous shapes. She wore a nervous smile as everyone turned to her, surprised at her appearance. She waved, a furious blush growing around her cheeks.

Before she could figure out how to address everyone, though, her eyes were stolen by the images depicted on the large mirror.

Instantly, her eyes widened.

Skullius had designated every heavily populated place on Aigas as the venue for his battle with Replicus – that, along with the tower, of course, which was the 'default battle ground', as he had put it.

When the two found themselves out of the tower, they would be transported to random spots around Aigas where living beings were swarming. If they (Skullius and Replicus) found themselves outside these places, they would be warped back to the tower.

Even though he had known about this, Replicus hadn't been quite prepared to face the looks of horror that surrounded him when he appeared within a shoddy, half-collapsed building filled to the brim with frightened men, women and children.

It was quite large, and many tents, beds and blankets were packed on the dirty, dusty, bloody floor.

It was a thoroughly pitiful sight.

How everyone scurried away at the sight of the tall, four-armed creature with a long spear in its hand, was even more pitiful, however. Common women hugged their screaming children while reflecting in their eyes a look of silent despair. Common men mustered feeble courage, grabbing sticks or stones, and moving to stand protectively before their families.

Many, many more simply scrambled away, trampling over whoever and whatever.

Replicus frowned. Something within him churned.

He wanted to say, "I don't want to hurt any of you," but knew it wouldn't do him any good.

"It got in! Something got in!" Replicus heard someone cry out and soon, he found several figures converging towards him.

Nine individuals in silver armour were bravely brandishing their weapons against him.

They were Capital Service Knights, all of them Masters.

To think there were individuals still clinging to their duties to the ordinary people and Pelian!

Replicus even saw three who looked like Mages chanting intricate spells.

'That explains the magical barrier I feel around this place,' he thought.

This building wasn't the only one there was. He was in a large town, after all, and it seemed to be under the protection of one of the last remaining collections of steadfast Knights Pelian had to offer.

When one of the Capital Service Knights swung his sword at him, Replicus easily caught it in his hand and grabbed the man as gently as he could.

He then ignored the looks of caution among his partners and scoured the town with [Sorcery of Essence]. He wondered...

Where was Skullius?

He must have been teleported along with him, right?

BOOOOOOM!

A bit too suddenly, the roof to the building was decimated as a large creature with sharp, orange eyes burst through and landed right in front of Skullius. The impact of its feet on the floor caused the building walls to burst apart, and of course, the unfortunate erasure of a majority of the commonfolk!

'Damn it!' Replicus thought and he immediately sent the Stolen Angel flying high and away with a Ju`wtte-coated kick.

His surroundings were painted red with blood, a few heads and limbs strewn about grotesquely.

The buildings in the vicinity – ten in all, and almost as large as the one he had been in – hadn't been spared either. While their occupants hadn't been obliterated, they rushed away frantically, screaming. Dozens of Capital Service Knights gave them cover.

These Knights looked in fear at Replicus, but they brandished their weapons and skills bravely. They were determined to protect the near thirty thousand souls they had defended since the beginning of the Great Trembling!

'I'm not your enemy,' Replicus thought silently while making sure the Stolen Angel wasn't on its way back yet.

He scanned the whole town (Its infrastructure was still mostly intact, surprisingly). He couldn't find a trace of the Hybrid Luman.

Where was Skullius? Was he hiding?

If the Stolen Angel was here, then...

...!!!!!!!

Perhaps it was instinct, or perhaps it was simply an outlandish, inexplicable desire to survive.

An alarm rang in Replicus' mind, but by the time he allowed himself to be chilled by its warning, it was too late.

SHIIIIIIIIIIING!

Likewise, by the time he heard the prolonged whistle of a blade's triumphant swing, IT had already happened.

A third or more of every building in the town had jerked upward violently, cleanly cleaved apart from the base by a boundless, merciless, lateral influence that couldn't have possibly been sent forth by a mortal!

It was an ominously comical sight that happened in less than an instant.

The eyes of the thousands who had been sharing the same fear of an unknown threat remained glazed with horror.

At the moment of the sharp strike, quite like the buildings, all the commonfolk and Knights had had their torsos forcefully stripped from the rest of their bodies. It had been so quick that for most, their legs continued racing towards a refuge that didn't exist, a safety that was never to be found.

For the younger and shorter ones, the tops of their heads had been divorced from the rest of their noggins, and for a brief moment afterward the damage, they suffered a semblance of carefree insanity.

All the same, however, everyone died.

Everyone except the Warmoth's Progeny, who, like everyone else, found that he, as well as his silver armour, had been cleaved in two as well.

Chapter 1192: The One Left Standing (6)

In a small village to the east of Pelian, near the border to Maqi.

"Silence," Skullius commanded, and the whimpering, sobbing and pleading around him ceased at once.

A series of corpses adorned in silver armour were lying around the group of innocents who were huddled together, chopped into several, leaking pieces.

The five hundred people standing behind Skullius in the damaged square right now, had been the recipients of constant protection by a few Stray Knights – dishonoured Knights – who had taken up arms to protect their homes. That privilege of theirs had ended quite unexpectedly when the Hybrid Luman appeared, however.

While this village could hardly be called 'heavily populated' by normal standards, given the status quo stemming from the Great Trembling, it certainly qualified. Most of the people here weren't locals, but poor souls who managed to find safety among the survivors in this village who had previously only numbered around a hundred.

With the current predicament, however, where this new arrival in dark robes had slaughtered their protectors without a word and snapped his fingers, which caused all of them to be teleported behind him in the village square, they began to wonder if they should have ever been optimistic about the future at all.

Skullius paid no mind to these people.

He took a breath and got down on one knee.

He grabbed the golden hilt of Demion's Dance and slotted it back into its sheath before grabbing the Bashful Abomination and holding it in a quick-draw stance.

Replicus was approximately nine hundred kilometers away in a town to the south-west of Pelian. Skullius could see it now by sharing the Stolen Angel's vision.

Replicus hadn't expected that, with the stipulation of the KUTHMUK, they could be in two different locations as long as said locations fell under the heavily-populated category. And of course, distance couldn't stop the two from fighting each other.

Skullius wore a casual smile.

'Ah, that's the face I want to see,' he thought.

A terrible presence built up around him. It was sharp, and faintly, one could hear the sound of the edges of sharp weapons scraping against each other from it.

Skullius drew a deep breath.

He was using another one of his Pinnacle Sword Styles – the Beyond-Scale Critical Divine Sword Art!

With this sword style, distance was meaningless to the user. In fact, the further away their target was, the stronger their attacks became. Well, it wasn't just the strength that was improved, but the capacity for creativity as well.

Skullius had grown to learn that the Beyond-Scale Critical Divine Sword Art worked very well with another one of his Pinnacle sword styles, Absolute Severance Divine Sword Art – the one that had brought the Ode of Maqi to his knees in Opungale.

Thus, as his sharp presence increased in breadth, cutting apart a third of the hostages behind him to something smaller than atoms...

Replicus had indeed been caught off guard. For him to be attacked so suddenly with the same attack he had grown to be wary of by an enemy that was likely not even within close range, was unfounded. To make matters all the more frightening, his armour had been slashed in two as well this time, rather than just his body!

This carried horrifying implications.

It wasn't just the fact that Skullius had some strange means to boost his attack power which was concerning now. It was also the fact that he was improving!

At first, he had only been able to leave a scratch on Replicus' armour, then he had been able to cut Replicus, but not his armour. Now, both had been slashed easily!

'Bastard!' Replicus thought and he immediately set to clash his Ju`wta together.

However...

To his surprise, the monstrous Stolen Angel's hand grabbed his left wrist and applied enough strength to turn it in the opposite direction!

..!

'It's starting to catch on?'

Replicus clicked his tongue and sent another hand to smack the Stolen Angel into oblivion.

Yet, instead of being obliterated at once, the Stolen Angel was suddenly engulfed in a vicious blaze of light!

This wasn't its ability to turn intangible in order to avoid damage, and neither was it the activation of the [Heart of Revelation].

Instead, with the same freakish output from before, the ability to repel attacks by sending out a vibrant stream of light was empowered and applied!

Replicus' hand was forced backward!

...!

Yet this wasn't all.

In the next instant, he was alarmed to sense a quick switch in the nature of the light. The [Heart of Revelation] was empowered this time, and once again, Replicus' defences were vanquished, leaving his sensitives exposed!

...!!!!!!!

Right then, the feeling of terror from before struck him again!

The buildings which had merely been sliced up once before, were cut into perfect, polygons by an overwhelming, chaotic slicing influence that went on to ignore the Stolen Angel, easily cut apart Replicus' silver armour, shred his innards, and mince six of Replicus' mana cores into fine magical grains... right before Replicus quickly used Ju`wtte Blizzard Motion to streak up into the sky!

At once, Replicus knocked his Ju`wtta together and recovered – even his mana cores were restored – but his armour...

'I'm not going to be needing it if there's no difference between it and a piece of paper anyway,' the Warmoth's Progeny thought to himself. His full ceramic ebony skin, spindly arms and torso were revealed, along with the kite-shaped hole in his chest.

He looked below.

The atrocity of a slashing attack which had just come from who-knew-where, had ended. The Stolen Angel glared at him.

'So, Skullius is not here? If we appeared in separate places, how did he know I was here? Does he use the KUTHMUK to his advantage? Can he decide where to send us or...' Replicus had begun to speculate when one of his phantoms gave him the answer.

'Of course!'

Immediately, Replicus' body shone with the light of Maximum Catalyst's Reversion!

Deep within his body, where he had been tagged by the Stolen Angel's first successful punch, was a half a skull mark that he had forgotten about!

Using Reversion, he got rid of it immediately, but he was sure...

'That's how he found me, huh? And he sent the Stolen Angel to my location at once. I doubt it's affected by the KUTHMUK unless he wants to bring it along,' Replicus reasoned, but midway through his thoughts, he saw the face of the mobile Attegoth appear right in front of him. It threw a mighty punch livid with 123 million tonnes of weight, but Replicus dodged.

The air behind him detonated from the power, and a nasty shockwave deleted the rest of the town below.

For a moment, as they were suspended in midair, Replicus' curved yellow eyes and the Stolen Angel's orange air stared deep into each other.

Replicus couldn't help but feel unnerved.

Was it just him, or was there a human-like complexity in those eyes that hadn't existed before?

Something about this thing was changing and the Warmoth's Progeny had a feeling this change wasn't going to be in his favour.

Chapter 1193: The One Left Standing (7)

An instant later, Replicus found himself inside the dark tower once again. The large black tiles were under his feet, a bright chandelier hanging above him. A blink after, the Stolen Angel appeared a few meters away, its menacing eyes glaring unblinkingly at him.

'I see. Since everyone in that town was killed, it no longer qualifies as an ideal battleground,' Replicus thought with a considerable amount of distaste.

The Stolen Angel suddenly pointed at him and almost immediately, a half a skull mark appeared on his now-bare chest.

Replicus frowned.

Before he could remove it with Maximum Catalyst's Reversion, however, he had been teleported outside the dark tower, and in the next micro instant, he was warped to another relevant battlefield by the influence of the KUTHMUK.

[Greatest Antiphon of Malignance] encompassed a wide scale teleportation effect derived from the skill [I Am The World], which had been assimilated into it. The Stolen Angel's half a skull mark was akin to a wireless connection which it used to forcibly attach the influence of its abilities on targets.

It had used the mark to forcibly teleport Replicus outside the tower, where he was then sent to another battleground by the KUTHMUK.

Replicus removed the mark just as he set foot in the wide open, clean streets of city he didn't recognise.

It was crowded, and unlike the one he had been dragged to last, the people here didn't seem distressed, anxious or frightened. That was until his tall, menacing figure appeared in their midst, of course.

Replicus' didn't have enough time to wonder where he was now, as a chill ran down his spine in the next second.

The city trembled so fiercely that one would have thought it was grabbed by some unnamed colossus and thrown halfway across the continent of Feinheath!

Another one of Skullius' ungodly slashes had come, but this time, Replicus' covered himself with [Maximum Neutral] just in time, furiously charging its output to the limit!

POW! BOOOOOM!

...!!!

For the first time, Replicus managed to defend against the cruel slash!

However, there was still a thick vertical cut across his skin where the cover of [Maximum Neutral] had been overcome to some degree, allowing the bare minimum of the slash attack through.

'There we go,' the Progeny thought.

To his surprise and relief, however, the city hadn't been completely decimated as collateral damage by the attack. Since the slash this time had been made with a vertical motion, only a few buildings, along with a few thousand people – of the nigh six hundred thousand in this city – had had their life memberships revoked.

Of course, to the inhabitants, this was quite horrific.

As many screamed and ran away, Replicus saw hundreds of figures, all bald and draped in thick, blanket-like robes, rushing towards him. Others among them wore armour, but instead of carrying swords and spears, they held staves along with shields.

Judging by the way in which they harnessed mana against him, Replicus asserted that they were all Mages, surprisingly!

This meant...

'I'm in Emeradis!'

The whole city thrummed with mana and Replicus watched as a wide array manifested around it.

The city's defences had been activated, but...

SHUK!

The Stolen Angel appeared in the ring the Emeradis Mages had made around the Warmoth Progeny and once again set to strike Replicus. It didn't throw flimsy punches alone, this time, however. Darkness pooled around it, formed thousands of orbs the size of fists, and began darting around haphazardly only to then shuttle towards Replicus abruptly for surprise attacks!

The fact that the buzzing of these orbs around the city – even without knocking into anything – instantly killed a few of the Mages, told Replicus that each of them was imbued with the 123 million tonnes of weight on top of the reinforcement of purple quality mana gushing through them!

'Just great!' Replicus thought and he increased the output of Maximum Catalyst at once.

One of the orbs knocked into him and though the impact caused two-thirds of the city to burst open like a melon, Replicus stood his ground. The shockwave that ensued kill more of the Mages and a number of innocents Replicus wasn't willing to ignore.

More of the orbs zipped in his direction just as the Stolen Angel rushed to engage with him in physical combat. Several, great tornadoes rose around the two as a result of the buzzing orbs. The Stolen Angel, with its light preventing Replicus' Ju`wtte from warding its attacks away, joined the fray.

It attempted to attack him from behind while activating its close combat skill, [Bombastic Imminent Barrage]. Its fist shone with all of the Aura it could muster, and it hurled it towards Replicus' back. The Warmoth allowed himself to be struck by the attack.

BOOOM!

All the Aura built up within the Stolen Angel's body ignited at a single point on Replicus' body.

The might of the punch was more powerful than the strength of half of the heavy orbs combined, but Replicus was unfazed.

The Stolen Angel then leaped and spun as it cast a dreadfully powerful kick against him, also powered by [Bombastic Imminent Barrage], and when Replicus dodged, grabbed its leg and pulled it over, he found that it had sneakily imprinted its mark on his shoulder. Thus...

The two were suddenly upside down and right side up, and upside down again. This was meant to confuse Replicus, but he still didn't succumb to the heavy orbs that came speeding towards him. Instead, he sent Ju`wtte to smash into the Stolen Angel which exploded and instantly reformed, a lot faster than before!

'Yeah. There's definitely something up with this thing,' Replicus thought, and sent two fists boring into the Stolen Angel's torso when it lunged at him again. It exploded but reformed, revealing itself to have once again cast a mark on him.

BOOOOM!

Replicus was suddenly engulfed in a dark purple flame that instantly melted the surroundings in fiery paste, but because of [Maximum Neutral], he was fine – the skill disallowed him from succumbing to all manner of change except ones he inflicted on himself; he was essentially turned into a constant.

The orbs knocked into him again, the shockwave demolishing another portion of the city. Buildings and people were reduced to dust, though Replicus thought he sensed more than a few thousand people get teleported away before they could perish.

He saw a wide barrier being erected around him and the Stolen Angel, where the battle turned even more furious and destructive. The Mages in the city were trying their best to contain them, but to no avail. Their barrier was ripped open almost immediately.

Right when that happened, Replicus heard distinct, panicked yells.

"Hurry! Erect it again! Wait! What are those?! Are... are those our—" but the rest couldn't be heard. Not that it mattered.

Replicus had already sensed several dozen items storming his way.

They each held the Mythical grade!

He heard the singing of a blade's edge against the air and he instantly knew he was in trouble.

Forty-eight swords of different kinds – scimitars, sabres, katanas, jians, rapiers and many others twisted and began attempting to stab and skewer Replicus with furious determination!

Some of them sent deadly slashes from afar and some sped forth like spears, others circling around themselves so fast they almost seemed like chakrams, and then they charged!

'You're kidding? He's controlling these swords from another country?!' Replicus thought, absolutely flabbergasted.

The might of the [Infinite Sword God] was broader than he could have imagined!

Replicus dodged a majority of the swords and their attacks, destroying ten that got too close as well... but then he got the ominous forewarning of the absurd viciousness of Skullius' ungodly slash coming from three of the swords at once!

SHIIIIING!

SHIIIIIIING!

SHIIIIIIING!

The full might of the attacks bashed into Replicus with so much power that he flew across the eradicated city, spinning like a top!

His [Neutral Maximum] was ripped open, and a great chunk of his mana was eaten away just to even attempt to reforge it!

The swords rushed after Replicus, as did the orbs and the Stolen Angel.

Right as he got on his feet, Replicus clicked his tongue again.

Well, it seemed he had witnessed enough. He had analysed enough.

What he had been hoping for wasn't happening.

'I thought he'd use more of his abilities once he believed I was at an extreme disadvantage. But he's cautious. He's not even allowing me to get close as long as we are outside that dark tower. He's afraid I'll inevitably become immune to his attacks because of my [Unbridled Wisdom of the Ascended Nullmancer],' Replicus thought. 'Well, it's not as if the robes are working.

They can't adjust to his freakish slashes at all.'

The Warmoth's Spine, which was always hoisted on his shoulder by one of his arms was finally unveiled.

Ju`wte sprang forth from it madly as the Warmoth's Progeny decided to kick things into high gear. There was no point holding back anymore.

Replicus scrolled through the twenty-five Blessings he had created using the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow over the last two months (he had had to wait for the Divine energy generated by the spear to replenish after he created five Blessings at a time). Immediately, he activated one of them, as he set to push back against Skullius.

Right as he decided this, Skullius, a great distance away, in Pelian, grinned nastily.

"Very good," he said softly.

Chapter 1194: The One Left Standing (8)

<I'm not particularly fond of what's about to happen next.> Suzamete said with a grave look on her face.

Boron chuckled.

<I expect that means things are about to become more interesting. I can already see the potential for higher calibres of Divinity here. Especially with the trick that dark one is using. Clever. Very clever. Though, I can't quite understand how he is doing it.>

Suzamete had no response to give.

She couldn't be excited about any of this. The world was about to know might the likes of which it hadn't seen since the Second Grand War. No, this was worse, far worse.

All she could do was hope that the end arrived as quickly as possible.

Of the twenty-five Blessings Replicus had created, roughly ten had been specially made in preparation for his battle with Skullius. All had significance in boosting his chances – though, in all honesty, Replicus hadn't expected that Skullius would be a great challenge at all.

While hoisting the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow upward, Replicus activated one of these special Blessings. The spear responded immediately, shining bright and giving Replicus access. (All the Blessings created did not reside in the user's body, but in the spear, after all).

At the same time, Replicus activated [Null Extraction].

Because of his evolution into Tier 4, the skill now covered the entire world in its range, but of course, the Warmoth's Progeny's aim wasn't to absorb Null Life Essence.

No. His battle with Caxellac had taught him that there was more than one way to use this skill.

His senses travelled with [Null Extraction]'s expanding range, crossing the entirety of Emeradis, and reaching into Pelian in a blink before finally locating the Hybrid Luman who instantly seemed to realise what was happening.

'Got you!' Replicus thought and wore a wide grin.

Skullius, even while in his Hybrid Luman form had a reserve of Null Life Essence. It wasn't in the form of a core, but it could still be traced. Replicus had tracked it down with [Null Extraction] and employed the help of the evolved version of [Greatest Null Weaver] – [All Null Commander], to pinpoint its location.

Thus...

Replicus, while releasing a wall of Ju`wte so powerful and wide that it resisted all the heavy orbs, the swords and the Stolen Angel, swung the Warmoth's Spine and...

"Full Spine."

At the words, the Warmoth's Spine wriggled like some diseased worm, expanded in girth and stretched in length!

Its fifteen meters of stature grew to no end as it took on what might have been the actual size of the original Colossus Warmoth's Spine. As Replicus swished it up, watching it coil upward like a gigantic serpent, or a ridiculous whip, he made it so that its length would be enough to reach Skullius from here!

SHIIIIING!

Another crazy slash parted the air, tore down his Ju`wte and aimed right at his head in that moment!

However, some strange, unseen force took the blow in full, leaving Replicus completely unharmed!

Strange indeed.

The Progeny swung the Spine, and it was as though a cyclone had descended. The Spine swished in the form of a blur across everything that was in sight!

Feinheath sank several meters into the sea and all across its three nations, a dreadful wind stirred wild chaos!

The Spine, now featuring an unending number of vertebrae blades along its length bit at the air, tearing it apart, producing a thunder clap!

And indeed, it met a great number of infrastructures on its course towards Skullius in the nearly-impossible-to-discern speck of time it travelled. However, the inhabitants of these structures were

none the wiser. Other than the terrifying turbulence the Spine caused, they were unharmed by the swing of the Spine which would have killed them all and their protectors before they even realised it.

This was, of course, because of the Blessing Replicus was using.

"All my attacks will only deal damage to Skullius," was its stipulation!

And sure enough...

Skullius' senses weren't advanced enough to discern the Spine's path in time.

It swiped from his right side before he could do anything about it!

POW!

The impact was horrendous!

The Crush and Shock damage released on contact would have razed and incinerated the entire region the village Skullius was in was located if not for the fact that Replicus limited the range of the damage to the Hybrid Luman!

The spine had smacked Skullius wayward brutally, BUT...

The Hybrid Luman and the hundreds of people who had been behind him... were unharmed.

A great shadow was under their feet which ensured that any attacks that didn't come from Skullius himself would not harm them!

"Heh!" Skullius scoffed at the Spine as it whipped back from where it had swept to after striking him, intent on lunging at him again.

He pointed at it and sent a series of slashes against it, but they all bounced off it inconsequentially.

"I see."

The Spine whipped about like a great snake and began attacking relentlessly, its coils and turns causing the air to crackle and shift in direction.

Skullius had been momentarily distracted, irritated even, by the swish of the Spine when a dire warning rang from one of his skills!

Before he could respond to the danger, however, his face was smothered by a large hand that grabbed onto it mercilessly, and slammed it hard into the ground!

The entire village exploded, the shockwave rolling outward to neighbouring settlements – however deserted they were.

Innumerable disembodied slashes attempted to mince Replicus the moment he came into contact with Skullius, but to no avail. They reduced the finer structures in the surroundings to dust, but they did nothing to the Progeny. He remained with his hand deep in the ground where it was pushing Skullius' face into.

Replicus had intended to crush Skullius' head and therefore confirm if he really was impervious to all kinds of damage when his strange darkness skill was active, but suddenly, the freakish output he had felt from the ungodly slashes many times now, exploded from the Hybrid Luman... and his entire arm was chopped into pieces – fingers and neatly cut slabs of flesh flying off into the air!

But Replicus kept Skullius pinned with another hand and infused a horrendous dosage of Ju`wtte into the Hybrid Luman!

Skullius lit up like a lantern and the surroundings turned dark!

Replicus saw Skullius' body start to emit copious amounts of smoke. He was taking damage!

This was it!

The bastard wasn't immune after all!

"Hey, sockethole!" Replicus suddenly heard from his right.

To his surprise, one of the commonfolk – a man – who had been with Skullius, was calling to him with a wide grin.

He and several others were standing around Replicus, their faces sallow, and their hair oddly turned black.

"I told you, didn't I?" the man sneered, "as long as the Prince is embraced by the dark, he will never know harm. But you, on the other hand..."

At once, the dark shadow that had been below Skullius expanded and drained the rest of the light from the entire village. Everything was devoured by it, assimilated.

Then, to Replicus' surprise, sets of great hands, some larger and some smaller, peeked from the great shadow, rising like stationery pillars into the air. They looked as though they hid their golden white radiance behind a dark, chitinous shell as dark as the shadow from which they rose!

All of them made no offensive movement, but Replicus suddenly felt something skewer his flesh and fasten it to something hardly tangible. He looked and saw that it was a stitch. His shoulder had been sewn firmly to the fabric of space!

Another stitch appeared, and then another, and another, and before long, Replicus was completely immobilised!

The common folk around him began chuckling menacingly, and Skullius' body, which had been drowned in the dirt, rose, a similar look of mirth over it.

His dark robes shed away and the darkness from his shadow began to feed into him like blood, siphoned into his very veins.

"You are taking me too lightly, fake. I am not only the Greatest Antiphon of Malignance or the Infinite Sword God. No, your informant is outdated. I have risen above that prestige already!" he declared as his whole body, while exploding with Nitros, became clad in something more sinister than a beautiful set of black robes.

"I am the Benevolent Melanoid Prince!"

Chapter 1195: The One Left Standing (9)

[Benevolent Melanoid Prince (Super) | Lv.5]

The user is deigned a dark inheritor of 'Evil Darkness', and all its conceptual affiliates, gracelessly equipped against all false light, ambling Divine scripts, and the vicious storms of bold, complex enemies adequately. The Prince stands his ground eternally, in the cold embrace of black.

<Passive Effects>

-The user's body is rendered completely immune to attacks of all natures as long as they – the user – are embraced by the darkness; a darkness-empowered shadow can partly provide this benefit while a more stable construct of darkness will give its full benefit.

-By chanting "DHYIESMYK BLACK" and a moniker tied to the object of interest, the user can store and expel anything within a large storage space that passively empowers all stored items with the user's powers.

-The user gains a magnificent understanding of 'tame' darkness, and the knowledge attained is best utilised with the use of 'CREATURE'. Evil Darkness expelled by the user will be used to cut down on the costs of all skills as a replacement for mana.

<Active>

[Sub-skill: Immoral Possessor]

Any living organism in the range of the user, should it carry even the slightest traces of 'evil', can and will be possessed by the consciousness of the Prince. All the autonomous functions, memories of the target as well as their abilities will be surrendered to the Prince immediately.

While some targets might be able to resist, it is hard to completely shrug away the power of the Prince, and up to 1,000 targets can be controlled at a time.

[Sub-skill: Dipped in Black]

All the Prince's attacks will be drowned in a deep darkness that accelerates the efficiency and power of all magical attacks by a minimum of 5,000% for six minutes. Further amplifications depend on the input from CREATURE.

[Sub-skill: CREATURE]

All the darkness – 'tame' or otherwise – in the maximum range of the skill will be converted into fuel to add onto 'Dipped in Black's' maximum augment, all physical attributes, and the hard shell that will adorn the Prince for battle.

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The might of [Benevolent Melanoid Prince] had proved indispensable so far and Skullius was deeply pleased by it.

It was a product of the merging of the skills [Evil Darkness Meshing], [Evil Darkness Creation], [Immoral Authority], [Boundless Evil], [Absolute Zero] and [Perfect Night Domain].

In Skullius' eyes, [Benevolent Melanoid Prince] had greater worth than [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance], which was why he had chosen to use it while the Stolen Angel utilised its light counterpart.

The nuance to this was as Replicus had surmised; using the same skill between himself and the Stolen Angel, for Skullius, led to the skill suffering in output for one of them, which was why he wasn't spamming all his abilities between himself and the mobile Attegoth at the same time.

Skullius gave a condescending look to Replicus. Several hundred civilians shared his enthusiasm and mirth as they did the same, gazing at the Warmoth's Progeny through the gaps in the many hands of the partly formed PHANTASMIC RETAINER, Spirit of Blind Drowning, Noboboyama.

And indeed it was the Spirit of Blind Drowning, imbued with one of the Seeds of the Fruit of the World Myths: Melding Stitches.

Skullius continued to be lathered in the darkness that was around him, a wide, triumphant grin on his face.

"You were really just a fake in the end, huh? Even when forewarned you didn't really do all that well," he sneered at Replicus and raised the Bashful Abomination. "Oh well, I did grow a bit, as I hoped, even though I yearned for much more."

He didn't waste another second, applying the secret he had been applying all this time to give his attacks inexplicable attack power and aiming to decapitate the immobilised Warmoth's Progeny.

SHIIIII-

But...

"And I was the one taking you too lightly?"

Something unprecedented had just happened, leaving Skullius starstruck. Two things, in fact.

For one, the Warmoth's Progeny who had been stitched to the fabric of space, bound tight, had suddenly vanished from Skullius' view.

But the most shocking thing happened a split fraction of a second later.

Behind a bewildered Skullius, who had yet to see Melding Stitches fail to render an enemy immobile, a dark grey flash exploded and expanded like a great wave of distorted fire, ripping the expansive shadow below him – along with the hands of his PHANTASMIC RETAINER – like paper!

Then, before he could turn, Skullius found himself feeling physical pain for the very first time in his flesh form!

He couldn't have narrated what had happened just now, even if given a time out, a chair to sit on, and a cup of tea!

A great ringing echoed in his ears and his flesh throbbed, stung and pulsed agonisingly!

"ARRRRGHHHHHHHHHH!"

Skullius shrieked in pain.

Ever since he had acquired the power to fool humans and beasts alike with a flesh form, he had never known his cosmetic flesh to hurt, but today, it had. He had inflicted pain upon himself for the first time!

'I... I didn't imagine it back then! There is something strange about... Argh! I can't heal from the effects quickly enough without effecting the output of [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance]!' Skullius thought, panicking.

Back when Replicus attacked him with that dark lightning at the very start, he hadn't considered the attack all that much, but now he was forced to.

That dark mana...

It hurt like hell!

As his body, twisted and craned at odd angles, bits of it burning and fragmenting as he crossed the skies, travelling past the edge of Feinheath and towards the sea, Skullius was given great warning about even more danger incoming.

The air screamed around him and he grit his teeth and forced himself to expand his senses.

A lengthy spine was snaking his way, cast upon him by a far away enemy and...

BOOOM! BOOOM! BOOOM!

On contact, Skullius was immediately walloped by condensed Ju`wtte which formed great bulbous orbs that exploded thunderously!



At once, the Crush damage crushed his bones and roasted his flesh almost entirely. This wasn't even to mention the fact that Skullius' body was slashed in half by the vertebrae blades on the spine as well.

Replicus' Inverted-Mana-infused punch had sent Skullius flying sky high where he couldn't create a shadow to render himself immune to attacks. The follow-up blows were free to rip him apart!

A second later, Skullius, heavily battered, found himself back in the tower. The KUTHMUK finally caught up with him as he had no longer been in a suitable battleground.

(He had flown away faster than its capacity to find and teleport him.) For a moment, he was relieved, but when the Warmoth's Progeny also emerged in the tower, his body still wreathed in the dark grey, his blank eyes – well, the one that was still present on his half-burnt face – bulged.

With a thought, Skullius had the Stolen Angel appear in front of him, cross its arms and impose all its WEIGHT onto itself to maximise its durability, but its defences were far too lacking to handle the monstrous punch that came.

The Stolen Angel was ripped apart like frail fabric and Skullius found that even while buried in the stable black tower, he was no longer safe. The Inverted Mana made it so that his wounds healed slower, and strangely, coming into contact with it lessened the benefits derived from his dark powers.

The remains of his figure exploded out of the tower from one end and were immediately warped to another suitable battleground!

His minced body, which had barely begun to regenerate its lower half by employing [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance]'s healing factor, caused a stir in yet another one of Emeradis' cities where, strangely, a full military force of Mages was already on standby!

"ALLESTO!" the hundreds of powerful, bald Mages cried as they extended their palms towards Skullius.

At once, a large array brimming with intense, purple quality mana appeared around the Hybrid Luman and began binding him with tight rings around his neck, what remained of his torso and even his mana core!

It then shook and started to condense, a terrible, violent surging force building from the centre of the formation, evoking a rupturing upward wave that began to disintegrate Skullius!

The Hybrid Luman looked murderous.

His blank eyes glared with an otherworldly demented intensity at the enemies and he couldn't believe it.

Fools of THIS calibre believed they were worthy of killing him?!

Darkness swelled in Skullius' mouth like vomit and he spat it out with a voice:

"|SHATTER FOR ME!|"

At once, all the Mages seemed to turn from flesh and bone to human-like crystal statues. Not even a moment later, they burst into pieces, effected by [Evil Veneration]!

...But Replicus had arrived.

As the array the Mages had made started to dissipate, he hijacked it using [Sorcery of Essence], and bound it to Skullius' mana core, ensuring that he couldn't simply teleport away without paying deeply for it.

Then, while gazing deeply into Skullius' shocked eyes, he uttered:

"[Rune of Immolation]."

At the call of its name, a giant, ugly rune superimposed itself upon the array the Mages had made and then...

A brilliance the likes of which had never been seen on Aigas since the Ashing of Time cast away all visibility. Then a hellish heat poured out of nowhere, smothered the Hybrid Luman and attempted to spill over to the rest of the world, punishing it in conflagrance.

But because of the Blessing Replicus was using, the torrent of golden fire crackled and exploded only around Skullius even as its brilliance threatened all life in the realm.

And thus, it burned and burned.

Replicus would have celebrated or better yet, piled on his attacks, but he had known ever since the start of the battle that things weren't going to be so simple. Logic wasn't going to dictate much of this battle, and things would increasingly become complicated.

Because of this, Replicus would have to use the weapons at his disposal a little more cunningly than he did when facing Caxellac.

As the light of the flame from the [Rune of Immolation] died down, Replicus saw it, even as he failed to comprehend it.

Darkness gushed like ink from all across the continent and headed towards the spot where great golden flames were rising, crackling, yet to reveal the fate of their target.

Of course, it was all but clear that the enemy had resisted defeat. He had rejected it, rather, from the very start.

He had hidden his soul away for that very reason, after all.

Chapter 1196: The One Left Standing (10)

"CREATURE..." Skullius declared softly as his outline became visible and whole from the flames. The brightness of the flames no longer hid away his fate. In fact, they seemed to magnify it; they spelled to the world that he was far from done.

Replicus watched as something darker than black took leisurely steps away from fire amidst the chaos, screams and thumping of racing feet all around.

He narrowed his eyes.

Skullius no longer looked the same. It wasn't a matter of gestures or expressions anymore that made it clear that he wasn't the same sane Skullius. Just the look of him truly made him seem like someone deserving of the title of 'Immoral'.

An armour so dark it might have been carved out of the unknown sat over his body. From the look of its fringes, it was likely a mix of leather and plate armour, but it was difficult to tell because it hardly looked three dimensional. No details showed from it – no lustre or substance.

All that could be said about it was that it was rather broad – broader than Skullius was, at least – and it featured three great tassets hanging from its middle, one to the right, another to the left – where the Bashful Abomination and Demion's Dance were – the last at the back.

Strangely, these tassets and the menacing mask that sat over the face of the helmet over Skullius' figure, were the only objects that seemed three dimensional. They held a shiny crimson hue and the intricate details of their texture could be made out. For the mask, this was even more true.

It was carved after the face of a ferocious, ugly fiend with deep, circular holes for eyes that spat black fumes, a sharp, long nose and an eternal grimace represented by great yellow teeth forever gnashed together as though in agony.

The only thing that remained of Skullius' Luman appearance was the light auburn hair sticking on top of the mask. It was swept back by the whipping of the wind.

This was CREATURE, a sub-skill of [Benevolent Melanoid Prince]. It could only be formed by gathering darkness from a vast range – shadows, colour and all would be drained from their sources, and converted into strength for the Prince. Skullius had used the mana from the Stolen Angel to activate the sub-skill as his own core had been seized by the array Replicus had hijacked.

A few commonfolk had given up on running away ever since Skullius had arrived. They had been watching. Some had paid dearly for this, being blinded by the flash of light from [Rune of Immolation].

More of the Mages from the city had arrived, but they didn't dare get too close. One of them looked like a high-ranking mage – an Arch-Mage – but he didn't think his title gave him the ability to assert his authority here.

Skullius saw the Mages as he finally exited the range of the blast and stopped. The fuming holes in his mask turned to the group and he snorted.

A sudden, subtle flash of darkness later, the Mages crumpled into fine, dry pieces that joined the wind before they could swallow a last breath.

Replicus frowned at this.

Skullius didn't miss his reaction.

"I knew it," he said from behind the mask, sounding as though he were far away. "You lied, didn't you? I was almost convinced you were indeed only aiming to strike against Somanda because you would feel vindicated, satisfying a deep-set need for vengeance when you steal back what was stolen from you. I had believed that YOU, the mighty Replicus, apparently, had killed Divinity. But no.

It was all a lie. A FAKE ideal to hide the truth. I see it now. You have changed in the worst way possible. You have absorbed... weakness. You have been enticed by it.

And you wish to claim the rest of it from Somanda."

Another inexplicable flash of darkness later, the entire town was reduced to nothing but dust.

All its inhabitants had been slaughtered, minced so quickly and so finely that it looked as though they had been... uncreated.

And indeed, it bothered Replicus. He couldn't keep a straight face when feeling the presence of two million people die by 'his' hands. Not anymore. Not after he had called out Actuass and Suzamete out for allowing such brands of atrocity to happen!

Skullius laughed.

"Funny how regression works, masquerading as evolution. You had no problem killing those goblins back in the Tremur Forest. Or the Dire wolves. You even slaughtered humans before and took pleasure in it! Now, it's odd, is it? Sickening even?

Don't make me laugh!" he mocked. There was twisted joy in his voice.

In the next moment, the two were transported back to the tower. The Hybrid Luman, no, the Melanoid Prince was hard to perceive with the background of utter darkness.

A few moments of silence prevailed.

The scowl on Replicus' face was deep. It made his visage look like stone.

He couldn't quite defend himself against 'himself' with this one.

Indeed, he didn't find killing people as easy as before. But that wasn't because of some divine revelation that all life was sacred.

It was because killing senselessly as Skullius had done, made him feel no different from Actuass.

The masked necromancer had claimed that all the people he killed had been nothing more than pieces only valuable to his goal; they all served to help him get his mother's attention.

But why.... Why did this bother Replicus so much? Why did the mass loss of life feel wrong and detestable to him now?

Well, didn't such a disregard for lives, leisurely tossing and toying with them match very well... with the profile of the same Arch-Lich who had imprisoned his soul?

Did Somanda not raid worlds and enslave millions of people as undead, making them work in mines or soldiers?

He did. As Skullius had once been an undead minion, he knew, that fate was no different from extinction. It was worse.

Perhaps it was the fact that Replicus had recognised that life wasn't as insignificant as larger-than-life characters would have him believe that changed him.

This change had been made apparent by Allora's death.

Death hurt.

It left scars, not on the deceased, but on those who loved them.

Replicus had felt it when Allora passed. He still held that scar.

Who was Replicus to take away lives and inflict such hurt large scale for NO reason at all?

He was neither Divine or even beyond, however contrary to that notion his power would have enticed him to believe, but...

Skullius snapped his fingers.

The tower burst apart, leaving them exposed on the blackened, smoking ground of the Tremur Forest.

It was no longer needed.

At once, the two were warped towards another relevant battleground.

This time, it wasn't on the map of Aigas, but some pocket within that had just opened to introduce its creatures to the wider world.

Skullius and Replicus appeared in a vast Cluster.

Their appearance caused quite a stir among the hundreds of thousands of odd, flame-haired fishmen adorned in wet, scaly hides. They all held considerable strength, and their Cluster General, who towered over them all at eleven meters in height, in his hand a great trident, exuded a mighty presence which wafted from a pale golden mana core in his body.

He had commanded his kin to race towards Replicus and Skullius who had appeared on a great rock protruding from their damp, water world when Skullius said to Replicus:

"I don't know what breed of Divinity you have met and killed, you damned fake, but I'll show you the one I know – the one I am."

Darkness and light blasted from him and surged into the skies to once again form the gigantic form of the PHANTASMIC RETAINER, the Spirit of Blind Drowning, Noboboyama – a great black monstrosity with innumerable arms clasping together from its long, thin body, its top end so high above it couldn't be seen.

...!!!

Replicus clicked his tongue at its appearance. As he had shown before, he was prepared to deal with it – courtesy of Serenity – however, this time...

Skullius didn't imbue within the PHANTASMIC RETAINER 'Melding Stitches' or 'Delight's Pursuit' as he had done in Opungale. No. He only charged with one other Seed of the Fruit of World Myths which had been too complex for him to use back when he fought the Ode.

The instant it was activated, Replicus felt the freakish output of power blast from it, and it was as though he was facing Caxellac's Mors Serene Grace again!

If he hadn't used Spatial Lightning to relocate himself at once, Replicus was sure he would have died!

As he floated somewhere high in the sky, he couldn't have missed the great, black blotch that had appeared east of Feinheath.

There, not only had an entire Cluster and its inhabitants been eradicated, the Rules that kept the world intact had been severed completely, and couldn't mend themselves.

Chapter 1197: The One Left Standing (11)

Ashema had felt the express need to rise even higher into the sky.

The battle was growing more and more intense, and he wasn't sure he would be left out of the piling collateral damage catalogue if he kept flirting with the expanding range of the conflict between the two versions of the same individual.

Be that as it may, however, the Carven was thrilled.



"They are monstrous!" he cried with a grin and a swig of the blood from his gourd.

Indeed. He couldn't believe how powerful Skullius and Replicus were, but for the former, it couldn't be overstated just how much of his (Ashema) hand played into it.

"I'm glad to see you are thoroughly abusing the knowledge you got from me. HAHAAHAHA!" the Carven laughed maniacally.

Indeed. If not for that fair trick, this might not have been a battle at all.

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Replicus saw the Noboboyama drift from the black void and fly over Feinheath quite speedily and gracefully.

He was however teleported away at once, appearing in a town that he assumed to be in Pelian. A moment later, the figure of the CREATURE appeared a few strides away from him, and the shadow of the Spirit of Blind Drowning smothered them both in darkness.

Replicus didn't know the effect Skullius had just used a few seconds ago with the Noboboyama. Serenity hadn't told him about it – likely because she didn't know it – but he was sure it was momentarily bolstered by the unreasonable trick Skullius used to grant his attacks immense output beyond their rank.

Only then had it gained the power to decimate hundreds of thousands of powerful Cluster beasts, rip apart a Cluster, and chew through Aigas' Rules.

Replicus' eyes shone.

'I still can't find where his soul is. It's not in his body. It's not in the Stolen Angel and...' he spared a moment to use his emboldened soul senses on the PHANTASMIC RETAINER above, '...it's not in that either.'

Replicus was at an extreme disadvantage in this battle. However serious he could get, he couldn't fight to obliterate Skullius. If he did, he would be killing himself. He had gone into this battle with that knowledge.

If it was simply a matter of killing Skullius, he would have accomplished that goal in less than a minute, but alas...

His plan had been to use Inverted Mana to deal high degrees of damage and subdue Skullius. Naturally, he had hidden this card for a while as it used up a massive amount of his mana with each use – much more than Maximum Catalyst, in fact – but now, he needed it. The Hybrid Luman was really hard to harm without it.

Inverted Mana could crush all mana constructs, including skills because it was far more potent. It was especially powerful when he inverted the mana from his two gold cores, which allowed him to even overpower the effects from Skullius' Super skills temporarily.

Unfortunately, Inverted Mana alone wasn't going to work.

Replicus' most favourable winning condition laid with making sure Skullius' body and soul were in one place.

Nomatter how much physical damage he dealt, there would be no point otherwise as he could be sure Skullius could find a way to remain intact even as just a soul.

"Don't look so distraught. Come," Skullius said as he grabbed the hilt to Demion's Dance. There was utter glee in his voice.

The Noboboyama above trembled.

Replicus knew at once. It was about to unleash another devastating attack.

However...

BOOOOOOM!

Aigas shook as the Noboboyama was walloped into dark oblivion by a strange, invisible force. It burst like a balloon!

...!!!

Skullius was stunned.

This came as a great surprise.

What in the world had just happened?!

Replicus wore a small smile.

Skullius couldn't have known, but a massive, long-snouted mercury dragon had been drifting silently in the skies since the battle started, waiting for the exact moment the Noboboyama would be erected. A quick swipe of its tail had been enough to dismantle it!

Of course, Replicus capitalised on the element of surprise. His Apostle, Beyrmir would remain invisible – with the use of one of his Classes, Spirit Walker – keeping the Hybrid Luman guessing.

"Nomatter," Skullius said chillingly, recovering at once, and he streaked towards Replicus with speed that bewildered the Warmoth's Progeny.

He had appeared as a black, messy smear on space even to the Replicus' eyes which were used to seeing atrociously speedy enemies!

'What?!'

Before Replicus could even process it, two of the arms on his right side had been chopped into pieces by a quick, tricky dark line!

The figure of Skullius turned into yet another messy, elongated smear, and in the next nano instance, a sharp yet heavy force blasted Replicus in his chest!

BOOOOM!

An ungodly weight came with the attack; it was so mighty that it shredded the entire settlement the two had been battling in.

Replicus flew off with pulsing pain livid in his torso.

That strength...

He couldn't have known but the boost gained by Skullius when he used CREATURE was that significant, so much so that Replicus' automated Ju`wte was too slow to defend him!

Replicus had yet to land when a dark shadow snaked on the ground from where he had come from and caught up, spitting out the CREATURE an instant later. Skullius was alarmingly quick, and his punch bashing into Replicus' chin reflected the steady, inconceivable physical prowess he had gained by absorbing the darkness across Feinheath!

Replicus felt his skin and skull fracture dangerously. His hand had darted before him to grab the CREATURE, but his fingers slid through Skullius' black figure as though it were simply air.

BOOOM!

Another shattering blow landed on Replicus' temple and he zipped off rapidly as the air clapped loudly.

'Damn it! What, is he a match for me in physicals now?' Replicus thought furiously.

He couldn't have known, but the accumulated darkness in Skullius had raised the bar of augmentation from his sub-skill [Dipped in Black], from 5,000% to 789,760% - bringing his attributes, magical and physical to astonishing heights!

On top of physical power, the WEIGHT attribute of Skullius' mana had risen from 2 million tonnes to just over 300 million tonnes, surpassing that of the Stolen Angel, hence why his attacks were more frightening now!

The Melanoid Prince's attacks would be bathed in darkness, representing the augments he received, which was why the slash that streaked towards Replicus at that moment appeared as a thin, black line aimed at his neck!

Replicus saw it coming and was halfway towards activating [Neutral Maximum] when...

Another slash, more lethal and ungodly than the one he was preparing for, slashed against his lower torso!

The Warmoth's Progeny wasn't split in half but...

...!!!!

To Replicus' horror, the purple-gold light which had been wrapping around him dwindled and faded.

It was only fair, after all, all his mana cores had been slashed!

A wave of intense pain crushed Replicus' senses!

The destruction of a core was fatal, as every core was linked to the soul. But thankfully, Replicus didn't possess a 'real' soul. He only had an insignificant copy, and beyond that, one of his cores still remained: the Null Core!

Because of this, he wasn't out of the fight just yet!

'Sockethole!'

It was as Replicus had surmised before – Skullius was growing!

He looked beyond and saw not one CREATURE, but six of them!

The Melanoid Prince was abusing his Infinite Sword God powers as well, applying the Slow Ghost Divine Sword Art to create apparitions that shared the might of CREATURE. That was how he had managed to sent two powerful slashed at the same time!

The CREATURES exploded with glee as they attacked.

Replicus scowled.

'I suppose you aren't underestimating me anymore,' he thought.

Even with his mana gone, he wasn't out of options – however regrettable that his gold cores had been reduced to something thinner than air. One of his phantoms immediately began recreating them with [Sorcery of Essence].

Meanwhile, Replicus used more of the Blessings he had prepared beforehand to fight against Skullius.

One that limited the amount of damage the Hybrid Luman could land on him. It capped at 35%.

Another that increased the Hybrid Luman's vulnerability to his own attacks. It capped at lessening Skullius' defences by 28%, which was a bummer, but Blessings had their limits, especially at a stage as grand as this.

Because all these Blessings had been created during the two months Replicus had been in the Timemould Mirror Box, he still had the full 50 million units of Divine energy stored in the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow free for use.

For these, he made a decisive choice to expend them all at once by creating a RULE.

"Grant me the power to see my enemies' hidden secrets."

At once, the RULE was made. Limiting its scope – Replicus hoped – would empower its effectiveness. His eyes turned from their usual yellow radiance to a seductive midnight blue.

The Progeny's view of the world was altered at once though nothing much changed in his immediate sights.

The six ghosts as well as the original CREATURE were upon him right after the Blessing was created.

This time around, Replicus saw the original CREATURE among them. While the rest were black with bits of crimson, the original Skullius was highlighted wholly in pristine white.

'This should make things a bit easier.'

Reinforcing his body with Null Life Essence, Replicus swung both the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow and the Warmoth's Spine to clash against the swords of the enemies at speeds that transcended lights by a large margin.

The oversized spine bore the weight and might of the sword attacks with ease while the spear had to be applied with flexible, spins and swipes to handle the slashes.

As Replicus' right arms were yet to be restored (and he couldn't use [Ju`wttta Resounding Restoration]) he had to fight with only the left set, but he managed still, quite to Skullius' surprise.

One of his ghosts drew back and used the Beyond-Scale Critical Divine Sword Art to launch an ungodly slash from afar, using the cover of unending attacks from the others to mask it as best it could, but Replicus' eyes saw through the scheme.

He saw the released attack as a sharp, messy line of pristine white that avoided harming the ghosts as it hurtled towards him.

Replicus entered the Ju`wttte Blizzard Corridor to evade it, but of course, his other enemies were quick and keen. They found him the instant he became visible again. Some attacked with the Beyond Scale Critical Divine Sword Art to ignore the distance, while the others surged to meet him in close quarters.

Feinheath knew a great many crashes and booms as the battle raged on all across its boundaries!

Replicus couldn't dodge every attack, but he performed quite well. The fact that some of the attacks enhanced by [Dipped in Black], which now had the capacity to hurt him normally, barely dealt any serious damage helped a lot. The Blessing to reduce the damage afflicted by Skullius was well worth it.

The KUTHMUK caught up to the speedy fighters and warped them to another place. This time, both combatants recognised it at once.

It was a certain Academy for Energy Formers in Genhuis City which had remained standing tall and proud despite the Carvens' expansive attack on Pelian.

It was the Reacher Academy!

Chapter 1198: The One Left Standing (12)

The Reacher Academy of Higher Magical Virtues.

Replicus had a feeble familiarity with the Academy, unlike Skullius, who, after they split, went on to learn about how to combine skills into greater forms using Aura, through one of the Arch-Mages there. Regardless, however, even Replicus knew the kind of monstrous Energy Formers that the Academy held. He had lived in Genhuis City before, after all. Their reputation preceded them.

The shared micro-daze between the two ended almost as soon as it had begun.

One of the six ghosts of the CREATURE dashed away and sent darkness and light surging into the sky in a matter of cryptically divided micro-moments.

Much quicker than when Skullius had done it before, the Noboboyama was summoned once again, and the Hybrid Luman immediately applied the yet unknown Seed of the Fruit of World Myths to launch another frightening attack through the PHANTASMIC RETAINER!

Replicus shook.

It was coming again?!

Though Beyrmir was already acting to destroy the PHANTASMIC RETAINER before it could unleash the Melanoid Prince's will, he wouldn't make it before the tattered remains of Genhuis City and the well-protected Reacher Academy were reduced to nothing but Rule-less darkness!



In the next instant, it began.

Replicus' new vision saw it.

Great, dark malevolent slashes – which appeared pristine white in his eyes – blasted out from all around the Noboboyama, attacking everything within a small country's radius!

The Seed applied to the PHANTASMIC RETAINER currently, was the third, 'Limitless Paradox'.

This Seed was one of the best examples of why the 9 Seeds of the Fruit of Worlds were best utilised through the PHANTASMIC RETAINERS. The Limitless Paradox allowed its user to apply a simple function infinitely within one full second.

A function could be a simple skill or mundane physical action – anything at all that fit the criteria of a basic command – and it would be executed over the maximum range of its conduit.

Naturally, performing any action infinitely within a second was quite... nonsensical, but that was the point of the Seed. Within a second – given a powerful enough function – it was practically guaranteed that the end result, was victory.

Like the other Seeds, Limitless Paradox didn't require mana to cast, but it was especially draining. Skullius' body would rupture if he attempted to use this Seed on his own, but with the Spirit of Blind Drowning as a conduit...

Replicus' felt the immense danger.

Skullius' ordinary slashes had become incredibly lethal because of [Dipped in Black] and CREATURE. If they were bolstered by his freakish output on top of that...

'No, that's not it,' Replicus thought as his phantoms helped him see.

He finally saw through the 'trick' Skullius was employing!

However, he didn't have time to mull casually over revelations.

His mana was yet to replenish. He could use one of his Blessings to convert Null Life Essence into mana, but his destroyed cores weren't reformed yet. Even if they were, the slashes coming now were ripping apart space and dismantling the Rules that made it possible for teleportation to be performed along its axes!

'Am I really going to need to rely on that already...?' Replicus asked himself as the first series of slashes, while dismantling Rules and ripping Genhuis City and the space it was carved on, crashed into him.

Yet...

...!!!

There was a resounding bang across the world and everything seemed to stop.

Replicus was stunned.

Skullius was astonished.

What the...!

The dark slashes littering the world were all suddenly frozen in place!

Both Replicus and Skullius had sensed quite an impressive detonation of mana – however skilfully hidden – right before the odd occurrence.

It came, to no surprise, from the Reacher Academy, which was surprisingly untouched by the slashes.

Three figures in thick robes were standing at the entrance into the Academy, and one of them, blazing with a dark purple quality mana around him, had his hand outstretched mustering every bit of his focus into a rare Patch of Magecraft.

The Binding Patch!

Skullius recognised this Mage instantly!

It was Arch-Mage Ryte!

He was the Arch-Mage who had helped him learn how to merge skills and answered his question on whether or not it was possible to make a mana core adapt to every kind of essence and technique!

The Patch he was using was a form of Ascended Magic – Magecraft of an immensely high calibre that substituted mana in its casting, for the essence related to the type of magic.

The Binding Patch, at least in Arch-Mage Ryte's possession, used time to stop its victims. Back when the Null Badubs attacked Genhuis City with the advent of the false Null Devil King, he had employed a spell called Shocked Time to stop them in their tracks.

Now, he was using a different spell, indeed fuelling it with, of course, TIME itself to stop the slashes!

Skullius grinned. His eyes met with Ryte's.

The old Mage looked disconcerted for a plethora of reasons, one of them being that he too recognised Skullius and couldn't imagine why he was at the centre of the chaos rocking Feinheath at the moment.

The other more obvious concern of his, was that the spell he was using, Clapped Time, was supposed to have ensnared Replicus and Skullius, but it hadn't.

For the latter, this wasn't the case because he immediately augmented the slashes that automatically enveloped his body with his freakish 'trick', and had them attack the incoming concept relentlessly!

Indeed. He was slashing against time!(Because these slashes were given the command to attack time itself, unlike the ones activated through the Noboboyama, they persisted.)

For Replicus, he was unaffected by Clapped Time because...

[High Level concept detected. 'Integral Time'. To learn the lesser essentials, an investment of 5,812,000 Null Life Essence is required]

The [Unbridled Wisdom of the Ascended Nullmancer] robes, which Replicus had on, immediately caught on to the concept!

It was the same that Eaniss had picked from the Reverse Clusters on the voyage to Edagon, and unlike before, Replicus now had enough Null Life Essence to earn it instantly – which his phantoms had done for him before he could even think about it!

[You have gained an affinity with 'Integral Time'!]

At once, Replicus was shielded from the effect of Clapped Time.

One of Skullius' ghosts immediately rushed towards the Mages, its eyes on Arch-Mage RYTE.

'I knew this geezer was in a different league! Almost reminds me of that—'

But he was cut off.

Another one of the Mages, an elderly woman with sharp green eyes, had whipped into action. A ferocious pressure blasted from her body, and it was as though the space around her had become rock solid. Her extended hand pointed far into the distance with two fingers, and far beyond her...

CRACK!

The world cracked like the interior of a brittle clay plot.

The sky shattered, pieces of it falling into a dark, starry abyss that kept growing like a gaping maw. This widening abyss featured in its centre, a mass of bellowing fire, quite like a dwarf star, emitting heat so atrocious that it bent the stable space all around it!

Even though the great crack had seemed distant a micro-moment before, it was soon upon Genhuis City. A mighty suction drew on all the targets around except the Mages and the Academy, drawing them to be scorched into oblivion.

The stationary slashes were pulled towards it.

The Spirit of Blind Drowning was drawn to it.

Replicus and Skullius were no exceptions, but the former seemed to derive a great degree of amusement from the harrowing ordeal. He couldn't slash his way out of this one (not because of a lack of power), and oddly, it seemed as though the whole area he was in was arrested by some kind of rigid force that disallowed any kind of spatial movement.

Skullius wagered it was the handiwork of the third Arch-Mage of the lot interrupting his battle with Replicus.

'No matter,' Skullius thought.

Since he was going to leave this world wretched world anyway...

Darkness filled his mouth and he called:

"|Aigas, make purchase for me!|"

...!!!

[Evil Veneration] was invoked and it answered the call.

The concepts being applied on Skullius in this moment suddenly evaded him, Aigas screaming as it peeled open around him, creating a pocket of normalcy where Integral Time and the pull of the dark, spatial crack didn't reach the CREATURE. It didn't last for long, but in the time it came to be, the Stolen Angel appeared before Skullius, its orange eyes keenly glaring at the new enemies.

Skullius grinned.

"You're finally ready, aren't you?" he said to the mobile Attegoth, and it nodded, its eyes gleaming.

Chapter 1199: The One Left Standing (13)

Skullius had created the Stolen Angel – the new mobile Attegoth – by using the Blessing he received from Luserus, Graceful Monolith of the Eminent.

He had only managed to fully manifest this creature a day before Replicus came for him.

Its composition was, of course, cultivated by fusing the eye he had stolen from Dellan, the Grinning Jester Fox and the body of a powerful but basic Cluster beast with an extraordinary healing factor that paired extremely well with [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance]'s own regenerative prowess (which he had captured during his journey from Opungale to Maqi) to the Preeminent Attegoth.

Because of the limited time he had after creating the Stolen Angel, Skullius hadn't been able to ensure that the Stolen Angel was very well acquainted with battle – even with its close combat ability, [Bombastic Imminent Barrage].

He had felt that it would be useless to try making the Angel fight against other opponents who were probably no match for Replicus. Thus, he gambled. The Angel's fresh experience would come from fighting the Colossus Warmoth's Progeny and in the process it would await Skullius' command to use its innate quality.

As this quality could only be used once per opponent and had strict requirements that required a lot of 'observation', Skullius had instructed the Stolen Angel to wait until it had gotten a grasp of Replicus' combat style and achieved a sufficient degree of... 'humanity', before using it.

The time was fast approaching, but right now...

As the gaping hole in the city conjured by the female Arch-Mage swallowed Replicus and some of the slashes, Skullius dismissed the Spirit of Blind Drowning and yelled, "Now!"

The Stolen Angel immediately activated [OverLight], a sub-skill of [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance] that maximised the light-based traits of the skill!

The [Heart of Revelation] above the Stolen Angel shone with astoundingly bright light just as its whole body turned into a pure mass of luminance as well.

The radiance was no doubt bolstered by Skullius' trick, and thus, it managed to reach the Arch-Mages and reveal their vulnerable innards – pushing away the effective resistance of their robes, their many defensive spells, skin, flesh and bones!

...!!!

Immediately following this, Skullius grinned and had the Stolen Angel activate another sub-skill under [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance]: [Soul Spawn]!

Twenty chubby, winged, bald creatures with no faces appeared around the Stolen Angel, all of them made of faint, golden white light.

In a blink (because Skullius had peeled away the effect against warping applied by one of the Arch-Mages), they reached the Arch-Mages and attached themselves to their exposed forms within which powerful Mana Cores and souls could be seen!

Right then, the effect of the [Heart of Revelation] ceased, but it was already too late.

The Arch-Mages were done.

The Soul Spawn had latched themselves onto their souls, and the immediate teller as to the fact that this did not bode well, was how the eyes of the Mages were suffused in golden white light.

Skullius grinned.

The dark malevolent space gap behind him vanished right when the effect he commanded on Aigas with [Evil Veneration] ended. Replicus was nowhere to be seen.

Skullius scoffed and looked to the Mages as he dropped to the ground along with the Stolen Angel.

'Of course. You are the exception,' he thought, looking at Arch-Mage Ryte.

The old man, unlike the others, wasn't completely subdued by the Soul Spawn that had branded itself onto his soul. He had an ugly grimace on his face, as though he was experiencing great pain, but he kept his sense of self.

Skullius chuckled.

The guidance field flickered in his vision as it announced:

[You have received two new Creeds!]

'Good.'

And indeed it was.

[Soul Spawn] was a skill that allowed Skullius to sway the localities of his enemies by appealing to their very souls through the chubby creatures that were summoned just now. The moment the Soul Spawn made contact with the target's soul, at the very least, the target would find it hard to retain control of their bodies.

If they succumbed to the 'persuasion' of the Soul Spawn, another sub-skill of [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance] could then be used: [Masterpiece].

The Soul Spawn and the soul of the target would merge to create a loyal subject of the Antiphon of Malignance that would be blessed with the same passive effects that Skullius enjoyed – all the light properties he had access to.

Right now, two of the Arch-Mages had been seized, but of course, the seventeen other Soul Spawn Skullius had created were eyeing the Academy behind Arch-Mage Ryte.

It was filled to the brim with Mages of all calibres, as well as other Energy Formers, watching apprehensively what was going on outside.

The only reason Skullius' Soul Spawn weren't rushing forth was because the defences around the Academy were still in place, but...

Skullius grinned.

He gave a command with the Stolen Angel.



Without needing to lift a finger himself, the new thralls he had made – the Arch-Mages – turned to dismantle the defences under Ryte's bewildered eyes.

"NO!" the old Mage cried and his hand shot into the air as he activated Shocked Time, a spell under his famed Binding Patch!

His compromised associates waved their hands and defended themselves, however, the male Arch-Mage with what appeared to be conjured sword of glass, and the female with a great purple orb that pulsated, releasing waves of ungodly gravity!

But Ryte didn't give up.

He immediately cast another spell the instant he felt that his attempt to stop his fellow Mages wasn't going to work.

"Cross Time!" he cried, and it was as though the entire Academy had become nothing more than a fading memory. It became illusory and lost all colour.

Skullius frowned slightly.

While he didn't know what the spell Cross Time did, he knew it wasn't something he couldn't undo or penetrate easily.

And he was right. Cross Time was one of Ryte's strongest spells. It forced the target to be bounced around different timelines in Aigas' history, with the maximum limit being six hundred years in the past!

Because of this, it was immensely difficult to effect the target in any way, as it was more likely than not that it wouldn't exist in the present time – hence the illusory form.

...But Skullius wasn't to be underestimated.

He unsheathed Demion's Dance, and as Mortal Ruin coiled around the green blade, he activated the one Divine Sword Art in his arsenal that he had yet to use in this battle.

The Unmotivated Bender Divine Sword Art!

He applied his 'trick' as he swiftly sliced downward, even while a fair distance from the Academy.

SHIIIIIIIIING!

A thin white line that bent lazily, tracing the path Demion's Dance took, appeared with Skullius' action. It looked like a precise casting of white paint on the air.

Ryte's eyes bulged.

Even before it happened, he knew at once that what he was witnessing was beyond anything he had ever seen before.

Skullius, whom he knew as Festos, that little man who had called himself a mere Swordsman Class-Branching into Magecraft back then... was really cutting through time!

There was thunderous clap and Ryte felt his application of Integral Time around the Academy kept sliced up!

But... was it?

Because it was his spell, he felt the way in which it had been dispelled rather vividly.

No. Cross Time hadn't been sliced apart.

It was... sabotaged?

The illusory nature of the Academy was culled at once.

Ryte panicked.

The other two Arch-Mages didn't waste the chance.

They immediately ripped the other defences from the Academy, allowing the Soul Spawn to dash in unrestricted!

"Heh!"

Skullius sensed the presence of several other Arch-Mages moving to act. They likely hadn't understood what was going on with their compromised companions until the magical spells around the school were undone.

Their response was quite fierce. They didn't hesitate to use lethal spells against the two thralls!

'Futile. I'll have you all as Masterpieces soon enough,' Skullius thought as he prepared to use the [Heart of Revelation] again.

But right then... Skullius sensed the presence of the Warmoth's Progeny following a crashing noise which emanated from the skies!

The CREATURE turned and he saw Replicus falling from a crack in the sky!

'I knew you weren't done for,' he thought with a scoff. 'And you probably got a few new concepts to toy with, didn't you?'

Skullius had known that this would be the case because of Replicus' robes. He had avoided giving them too much to work with because he understood their powers, but the Mages didn't.

Anticipating the worst, Skullius' body exploded with darkness and light. He would summon the Noboboyama quickly, before it could be destroyed like before, and kill Replicus or at least deter him from freely using whatever he had absorbed.

...

In the next few moments, however, Skullius soon found that he had severely underestimated the Warmoth's Progeny.

Even from the distance, he sensed the shuddering waves hissing from Replicus' new, rapidly weaving mana cores!

It was....!

Chapter 1200: The One Left Standing (14)

Replicus flew down with about as much grace as a feather, only, his emergence hadn't been serene and barely noticeable; he wasn't light after all, and neither was he fragile. He was quite the opposite.

'Skullius is playing a very dangerous game here,' he thought, his now blue eyes fixed on the Hybrid Luman and the chaos happening between the enthralled Arch-Mages and their lucid counterparts.

He had figured it out!

He had figured out Skullius' 'trick' with the Rule had applied to his eyes!

The CREATURE and his ghosts, come disappearing and appearing, was glaring at him, ready to attack. He was gathering [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] rapidly in an attempt forge the Noboboyama and use it to attack simultaneously, just like he had done before.

The great PHANTASMIC RETAINER had formed, Limitless Paradox applied to unleash another torrent of hellish slashes through [Infinite Sword God] that would rip through Aigas Rules, but...

POW!

The tall monstrosity instantly dispersed with a heavy shockwave as the unseen Beyrmir managed to obliterate it in time!

Skullius scowled, but his face behind CREATURE's mask turned even nastier when the Reacher Academy for Higher Magical Virtues was suddenly engulfed in a radiant light, a loud, pseudo-mechanical groan exploding from it at the same time. T

Then it was gone.

All that was left behind were Skullius' Masterpieces who had rejected the powerful warping magic – as they had been in its range as targets – and the Soul Spawn.

The Mages of the Academy had used Skullius' distraction to immediately escape!

'There's nowhere they go that I can't follow... eventually,' the Hybrid Luman thought but his eyes remained on Replicus. He couldn't have taken away even a fragment of his focus now that the Warmoth's Progeny had returned from the spatial pit from before while wielding new immense powers.

He was wary.

Replicus was glad he was.

Right after he had gotten an affinity with Integral Time, the option to acquire an affinity with Genesis Compound – the concept the female Mage employed to manifest the crack in space with the great ball of fire in the midst – had also appeared, and his phantoms had wasted no time making sure it too was added to his arsenal.

While Replicus was being dragged into the crack, he managed to avoid getting swallowed by the star-like ball of heat. During that short period when he took a break and gazed at the scorching flame – which he had to protect himself against with Null Life Essence – his phantoms immediately brought to his attention the idea he had postponed for over two months.

"Now is the time, Prime!"

"Yes. Unlike that place, there is a lot of mana in Aigas. Rather than recreating our mana cores as they were before, we can make them better now."

"The application we used to link the Maximum Catalyst to THAT type of mana core... we can finally achieve it on a wide scale!"

And indeed, Replicus could now do it.

The type of mana core referenced to by the third phantom, was of course, the Nature-Bound Malleable Form Core!

Replicus had acquired this core after using [Unbound] on his mana stat. The core naturally resonated with all concepts and essences in the world, and Replicus had once tied its Refinery – where the nature of a mana core was decided – to his Maximum Catalyst, which allowed him to dramatically reduce the cost of using the Rule-level concept.

The core had been destroyed a few minutes ago, along with all of Replicus' other mana cores by Skullius, but thankfully, during the two months the Progeny spent in the Timemould Mirror Box, he had mastered the formula for the creation of the Nature-Bound Malleable Form Core with the help of [Sorcery of Essence]!

After learning the secret, he had intended to make all his mana cores the same, but unfortunately, there was no mana in the Warmoth's Treasury or the Timemould Mirror Box, and thus, he hadn't been able to put his new knowledge to good use... until now.

Aigas was dragged towards Replicus the instant he used [Sorcery of Essence] to drag all the mana he could towards himself.

At once, two shining lights stabbed from the Progeny's abdomen as he swiftly began the creation of two mana cores at once. Normally, living beings could only connect one mana core to their souls manually, but Replicus was so proficient in mana control (and quite the absurd anomaly composition-wise) that he rejected that restriction.

Mana was rapidly condensed with each microsecond that passed and soon, the Centres of his mana cores were forged successfully, the construction of their Refineries following right after.

It was here that the true essence of the madness Replicus invoked shone. The key to creating a Malleable Form Core lied with the Refinery mainly. Rather than one, a core like this required multiple Refineries and a loose Shell.

Normally, a core couldn't have more than one Refinery, as that would render it unstable, but if it could happen stably, there would be more diversity to the core in casting more niche abilities.

A Malleable Form Core didn't simply allow its user to be diverse, however. It pushed them beyond that. This was why it had to have at least seven Refineries, all with elements that linked them together in order to thoroughly deconstruct and manage a nigh unlimited combination of elements.

The loose Shell (as opposed to a normal mana core's hard, sealed one) would allow the core to interact with the environment outside the user's body and interpret the world on its own, a feat that could only be achieved with a godly level of understanding where mana was concerned.

And Replicus had reached it.

This was why it didn't even take a second for the Refineries of the two cores to be established, and then their Shells.

Once this was done, Replicus activated [Mana Centurion], quadrupling the cores.

Then, he tweaked them, connecting them to concepts he had affinities for.

Right then, Replicus' blue eyes caught the flashing of many slashes heading his way.

They were meant to once again cut his cores apart, ridding him of his progress!

But he was aware.

"[Static Limbo]!" he called and he, just like Caxellac, cast the skill on the entirety of Feinheath!

At once, it was as though a great, invisible blob of thick, viscous slop was sitting on the world, turning every single movement – whether performed by living or inanimate things – on the continent, sluggish at best!

...!!!

Skullius was stunned, but only for a moment.

He didn't need to move in order to attack, after all.

Yet, that momentary slackening in his fierceness, followed by his and Replicus' relocation to yet another populated town where the inhabitants were bound by a broad substance they couldn't quite see or touch, allowed Replicus to finish his work.

Maximum Catalyst was imbued and linked to one core.

Absolute Frost was inserted and bonded to another.

Then came Integral Time, Genesis Pull, Lambent Phosphor, Coordinated Disruption, Spatial Lightning, Distorted Gravity, Stagnant Space, Grand Fire, and Crafty Wool.

Replicus' soul had indeed felt churned when he lost his cores to Skullius' master slash, but now it nearly screamed when the might of the new cores both poured into it and demanded sustenance at the same time!

Skullius was shocked, but he was bewildered when Replicus showed a terrifying feat of adaptation when the two stumps on the right side of torso, where he (Skullius) had slashed off the Progeny's arms, suddenly flashed gold and manifested two new arms, the upper one with a Ju`wtta!

...!!!

Indeed, Replicus had just applied Integral Time, winding it back a bit!

But that wasn't the worst of it. Well, not for Replicus.

A familiar blow blasted into Skullius' face from out of nowhere, a dark grey sheen evident within it!

Replicus hadn't moved to attack at all, but the Hybrid Luman roared in agony as the first punch Replicus had landed on him with Inverted Mana before travelled through time to kiss his face once more... and then once more... once more and...